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ABSTRACT

Empire State College (ESC) is an alternative college that uses an individualized degree plan, assessment of prior learning, and a learning contract arrangement. Data were collected from 4,543 entering students at ESC between fall 1974 and January 1977 on a Student Biographical Inventory (SBI). The SBI included items on the students' background, sources of financial support, reasons for selecting ESC, and a series of questions about how the students view themselves, personal goals, and self-ratings on various intellectual and developmental areas. Male students perceived their leadership ability as higher than female students across the age range from 23 to over 58. Males perceived their ability to handle stress as higher than females until the age of 51 when both sexes were at the same level. Female students perceived their academic ability to be higher than males from the age of 30 onward. Both men and women have significantly higher graduation rates at midlife (ages 37-43) than at younger or older ages. It may be that the midlife transition period represents a second chance or a last chance opportunity for many adults who have decided they intend to complete a degree. (27 references) (CML)

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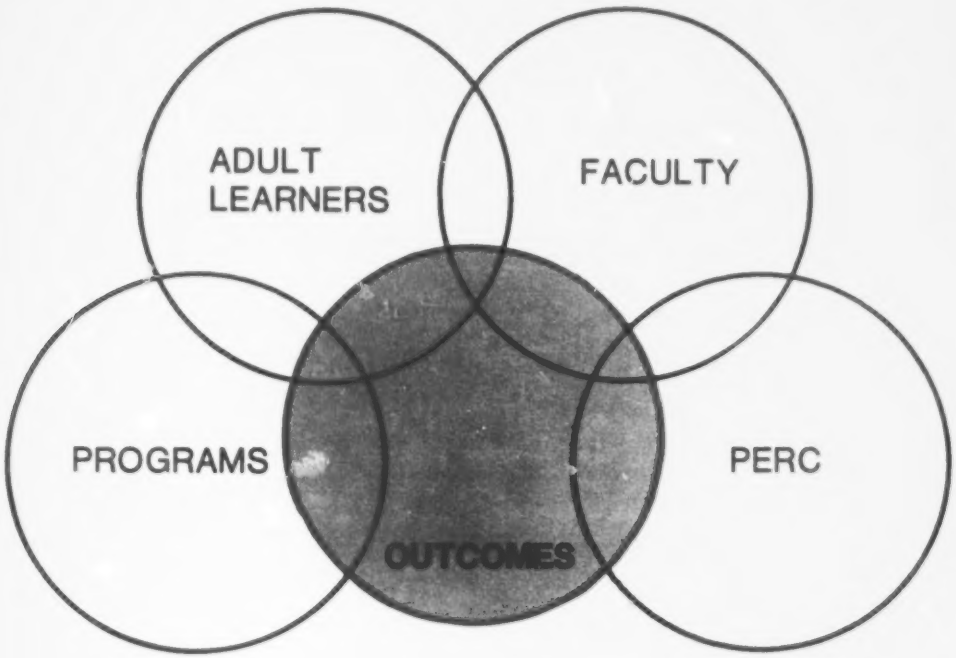

DO MEN AND WOMEN IN TRANSITION HAVE DIFFERENT EDUCATIONAL NEEDS?

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Empire State College Research Series

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DO MEN AND WOMEN IN TRANSITION HAVE DIFFERENT EDUCATIONAL NEEDS?

ADULTS' PERCEPTIONS OF THEIR ACADEMIC ABILITIES IN A LIFE CYCLE FRAMEWORK WITH IMPLICATIONS FOR FACULTY ADVISING, ADULT SUPPORT SERVICES, AND THE MID-LIFE TRANSITION PERIOD

Prepared by

Office of Research and Evaluation
Empire State College
Saratoga Springs, New York

1980

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DO MEN AND WOMEN IN TRANSITION HAVE DIFFERENT EDUCATIONAL NEEDS?

I appreciate the opportunity to share with you some research data on the subject of adult learners in transition that I have been working on for the past six years. I come from a college, Empire State College, that is conducting its own transitional celebrations this year--a 10th year anniversary celebration as a college, the only one of its particular kind in the United States. I have, therefore, several professional as well as personal reasons to join in this Conference's celebrations and am glad to contribute to the growing dialogue on the theory and practice of adult education.*

My Conference topic, "Do Men and Women in Transition Have Different Educational Needs?" perhaps should be retitled "Men and Women in Transition: Education as a Major Vehicle for Creating New Life Structures." How have we as educators worked with adult learners in our campuses and in our classrooms? Until recently adult learners have been viewed as basically like any other degree oriented student, except they may be somewhat older. Continuing and adult education programs have been around on college campuses for a long time; as long as those programs can pay for themselves, adult learners have been most welcome. In short, adult learners in the past have been identified, recruited, educated and certified much as any other student. Age, developmental phase, gender, and other developmental concerns have either been ignored or been seen as irrelevant to the educational tasks at hand.

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*An earlier version of the paper was presented by Timothy Lehmann, Assistant Vice President, Office of Research and Evaluation, Empire State College, at the Second National Conference on the Adult Life Cycle: From Theory to Practice at Overland Park, Kansas, sponsored by the Adult Life Resources Center, The University of Kansas, November 23-25, 1980. The research reported in this paper was conducted with the support of the Fund for the Improvement of Postsecondary Education.

In contrast to that view of adult learners, I have drawn upon the pioneering work of Levinson (1974, 1977, 1978), Gould (1972, 1978), Neugarten (1968, 1978) and a few others, to construct an argument and framework to analyze data on adult learners. The argument runs like this:

1. Over the life cycle, men and women at each age-normed phase encounter particular developmental tasks that must be faced, worked on and resolved.

2. Men and women encounter basically the same set of developmental tasks over the life cycle but the way they perceive, react, act upon, and resolve those tasks varies.

3. Encountering the developmental tasks of each phase in the life cycle is fundamentally a learning process: each adult must decide, sometimes carefully and consciously, but most often rather haphazardly and unconsciously, how he/she will respond to the challenge, risks and opportunities presented by the developmental tasks.

4. Men and women also vary considerably in their educational needs over the life cycle; in part, educational needs are shaped by the particular developmental tasks found in each phase.

5. Formal educational programs, those we know in colleges and universities and especially those programs in alternative colleges, have unique opportunities and responsibilities to facilitate adult learning leading to the resolution of developmental tasks in each phase.*

6. The mid-life transition phase is a crucial one since the life structure constructed during the era of early adulthood must be reassessed and reconstructed for the second half of life--the eras of middle and late adulthood.

In short, I am arguing that men and women face similar developmental tasks across the life cycle but that the role, contribution and impact of education will vary considerably for men and women in each phase. This paper focuses upon the mid-life transition period because this transition point has been suggested by Levinson as the most critical one in the life cycle and because it is a convenient way to test out the argument above.

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*Educational programs, as a result, must be flexible in design, content, access, and process so that adult learners can accommodate different educational needs and resolve common developmental tasks; otherwise, education can aggravate already stressful situations, lead to dissatisfaction, and eventually attrition. The double-edged nature of education here reveals that education can be both, and often at the same time, is a growth enhancing opportunity and a threatening, life-constraining force.

The Empire State College Context: Individualized Education as a Means for Maximizing Successful Resolutions of Mid-Life Developmental Tasks

It is necessary to understand the core ideas of Empire State's mission before we examine the data on adult learners taken from this setting. Empire State College was founded within the State University of New York as an experimental institution to provide alternative ways for New York residents to obtain a college education. In order to meet the needs of adults, the College designed an individualized program with a delivery system that moved beyond the traditional time, place, content, and format of higher education (Empire State College, 1977, 1978, 1979.) Three educational principles shape the ideas behind the College's academic programs:

1) that effective learning derives from the purposes and needs important to the individual.

2) that learning occurs in varied ways and places.

3) that styles of learning and of teaching may differ significantly from person to person and from one setting to another.

These three educational principles have been translated into three key concepts that form the academic program of the College: an individualized degree plan, an assessment of prior learning process, and a learning contract arrangement that guides a student toward the completion of the remaining academic work required for the degree. The College considers the State of New York as its "campus" and serves its 4,000 students through regional learning centers in the major metropolitan areas (Buffalo, Rochester, Albany, New York City, Long Island) and in more rural areas across the state.

The research office at Empire State College has developed a comprehensive longitudinally-based program for examining adult learning (Palola, et. al. 1977, 1976).

Empire's students are different in many ways from traditional students: they are older (average age 37); married (68%); work full-time (73%); are mostly employed in professional and other white collar jobs and have almost three years of prior college learning. Because the College enrolls students who literally span the entire age range (students range in age from 16-82), this population is an ideal one to test out ideas about developmental phases and life cycle learning.

The Life Cycle Framework

Drawing upon the work of Levinson and Gould, we have extended and elaborated a framework to cover the entire life cycle. Figure 1 provides a condensed picture of seven developmental phases with appropriate age groupings and developmental tasks for men and women (for an extended discussion of each phase, see Lehmann and Lester, 1978).

Mid-life transition phase (37-43) is the most crucial one of all the transitions identified by theorists of adult development. The mid-life transition period comes not only near the chronological mid-point of an individual's life span, but it is a major transition point between the life structure created and modified during the 20's and 30's and the need to restructure an individual's life to fit the realities of the present and future. The central issue raised at mid-life is the "goodness of fit between the life structure and the self." Levinson (1978) introduces four developmental tasks that constitute the process of mid-life individuation: young/old; destruction/creation; masculine/feminine; and attachment/separateness.

Growing up changes into growing old sometime around age 40. Social and psychological time changes at this point as life is restructured in terms of

Figure 1

Developmental Phases for Men and Women

Sex	Developmental Phases						
	Pulling Up Roots (23)	Getting Into Adult World (23-29)	Putting Down Roots (29-36)	Mid-Life Transition (37-43)	Middle Adulthood (44-50)	Late Adulthood (51-57)	Early Retirement (58+)
Developmental Tasks/ Marker Events	Leaving the family-Individual separates physically, psychologically, sociologically. Regard self as adult. Sex roles clarified & specified.	Initial life structure constructed. Life commitments made-seen as irrevocable. Develop capacity for intimacy.	Deepen commitments-invest self in work, family & valued interests. First signs of aging. Disenchantment with mentor. Culminating event.	Time-shift-growing up to growing old. Traumatic passage. Developmental polarities: young/old; destruction/creation; masculine/feminine; attachment/separateness. De-illusionment.	Restabilization Best time of life. Manage three-generation family relationships. Renew social/community activities.	Review life course. Generativity. Mellowing. Accept & adjust to physiological aging process.	Prepare for retirement. Complete life review. Search for security & financial support. Aging process accelerated. Integrity vs. despair.
Men	Select college or first job. Search for mate & mentor. Peer groups sustain separation.	Build the dream. Complete education. Initial career started. Secure a mate. Secure a mentor.	BOOM Deepen pursuit of dream. Competitive climb, establish success. Physical fitness preserved.	Dream-reality gap. Compromises made. Occupational die is cast. Marital instabilities-high stress. Break with mentor	Dream reconciled Mentor no longer needed. Serve as mentor to others.	Cap a career. Create social heirs. Sponsor young. Increased conformity & passivity.	Retirement. Develop leisure interests. Travel. Renew friendship & family ties.
Women	Defining Identity -via parents, husband or self. Seeking a mate. Select college or first job.	Secure a mate. Build a "nest". Carry & support husband's dream. Bear children.	BOOM "All points survey". Family obligations high. Introspection & search for balance.	Empty nest syndrome. Build own dream. New sense of self & youth. Seek career & education.	New life constructed. Dream developed-initial success Complete education	Pursuit of dream Extend career & success. Serve as mentor to young.	No retirement. Cap a career. Rehearsal for widowhood.

Sources: Adapted from Levinson (1974,1977,1978), Gould (1972, 1978) and Neugarten (1968, 1978).

time left-to-live, rather than time-since-birth (Neugarten, 1968, 1978; Merriam, 1979). Each individual recognizes that time is finite and is beginning to run out. The sense of aging is closely related to the sense of bodily decline. The individual confronts his/her own mortality in a serious way as the prospect of death takes on a personal meaning. A person's sense of strength and omnipotence is now evaluated in the context of declining strength and the early signs of the aging process.

For the man, a sense of disparity exists between his Dream and its actual fulfillment. As Levinson puts it: The man experiences the gap between "what I've reached at this point" and "what it is I really want" which in turn raises the soul searching question of "what is it I really want" (Levinson, 1974, p. 254). By this time, the man knows where he placed in the running of occupational hurdles. If he falls short, he must adjust his Dream downward or in other directions. If he is successful, he must find a way to expand himself creatively so that he will not stagnate in his own success. This is a time when the man realizes he may not become the corporation president as projected in his Dream. Accompanying these external changes in the male's life structure are internal changes in the individual's self concept, especially regarding the dominance of masculine or feminine characteristics. In the putting down roots phase, the man displays his masculine traits visibly in his drive to succeed, his need for dominance, his search for power and the competitive achievements that support the male identity. At mid-life, however, the man has reached the zenith of his masculinity. There is now an opportunity to develop the more neglected feminine side of his self. Feminine qualities of nuturing and supporting other people, and taking a renewed interest in his children's activities may come to the fore.

For the female, this period may lead to the resolution of many questions raised by the "all points survey" of the preceding phase. The period of motherhood is about over. It is a period where women return to the work world with renewed interests and energies, seeking out more meaningful jobs and new careers. It is a period where women may return to higher education, preparing for a future that will utilize their talents and abilities in more satisfying ways. During this period, many women shed their submissive, subordinate maternal roles and become more assertive, competitive, ambitious and energetic about building a new life structure that encompasses new aspects of themselves.

The Sample

As part of the research program at ESC, each entering student is requested to complete a Student Biographical Inventory (SBI). The SBI contains questions about a student's background, sources of financial support, reasons for selecting ESC, and, most important to this paper, a series of questions about how the student views him/herself, personal goals and self-ratings on various intellectual and developmental areas.

Between fall 1974 and January 1977, all entering students received the SBI. A total of 4543 respondents completed the Inventory (a 62% response rate, checked for representativeness against the entire student body). Table 1 shows these respondents classified by phase and sex. These data form the foundation for my analysis and discussion.

Table 1

Sample Distribution of Adult Learners at
Empire State College by Sex and Developmental Phase

Sex	Pulling Up Roots (< 23)		Getting Into the Adult World (23-29)		Putting Down Roots (30-36)		Mid-Life Transition (37-43)		Middle Adulthood (44-50)		Late Adulthood (51-57)		Early Retirement (58+)		Totals	
	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%
Male	144	(40)	571	(53)	484	(52)	364	(45)	283	(38)	185	(43)	70	(46)	2101	(47)
Female	217	(60)	505	(47)	446	(48)	443	(55)	459	(62)	245	(57)	82	(54)	2397	(53)
Total	361	(100)	1076	(100)	930	(100)	807	(100)	742	(100)	430	(100)	152	(100)	4498	(100)

Source: Office of Research and Evaluation, Student Biographical Inventory, July 1974 - December 1976.

Methodological and Conceptual Caveats

In Figure 1 and Table 1, I am using seven-year age intervals as rough approximations of developmental phases. Establishing the link between chronological age and developmental phase is a difficult theoretical, methodological, and empirical task. Using age alone as a key indicator of an individual's phase of development has obvious drawbacks. I am well aware that any given individual could be in a different developmental phase than his or her chronological age might convey. I think our sample size is large enough, however, to reveal general patterns in the data and to overcome the errors of misplaced cases. Furthermore, I agree with Neugarten who said: "the age structure of a society, the interrelation of age-norms, and age group identifications are important dimensions of the social and cultural context in which the course of the individual life-line must be viewed" (1968, p. 146).

Figure 1 depicts a rather standard portrait of upper middle class, suburban, well educated, nuclear family values that has been the focus of many research studies so far. This dominant portrait needs to be qualified in many respects. There are many subtypes of both men and women who progress over the life cycle in different ways than those which are portrayed in Figure 1.

Life Cycle Findings

In order to answer the question "Do Men and Women in Transition Have Different Educational Needs?", I have prepared a series of profiles drawn from the SBI question where students were asked to rate themselves on a list of traits as to how they compared with the average person of their own age. This question essentially tapped the individual's perceptions of themselves in relation to others. All those students checking above-average or highest

10% were grouped together. The profiles were constructed then according to the age-phase groupings corresponding to those presented in Figure 1.

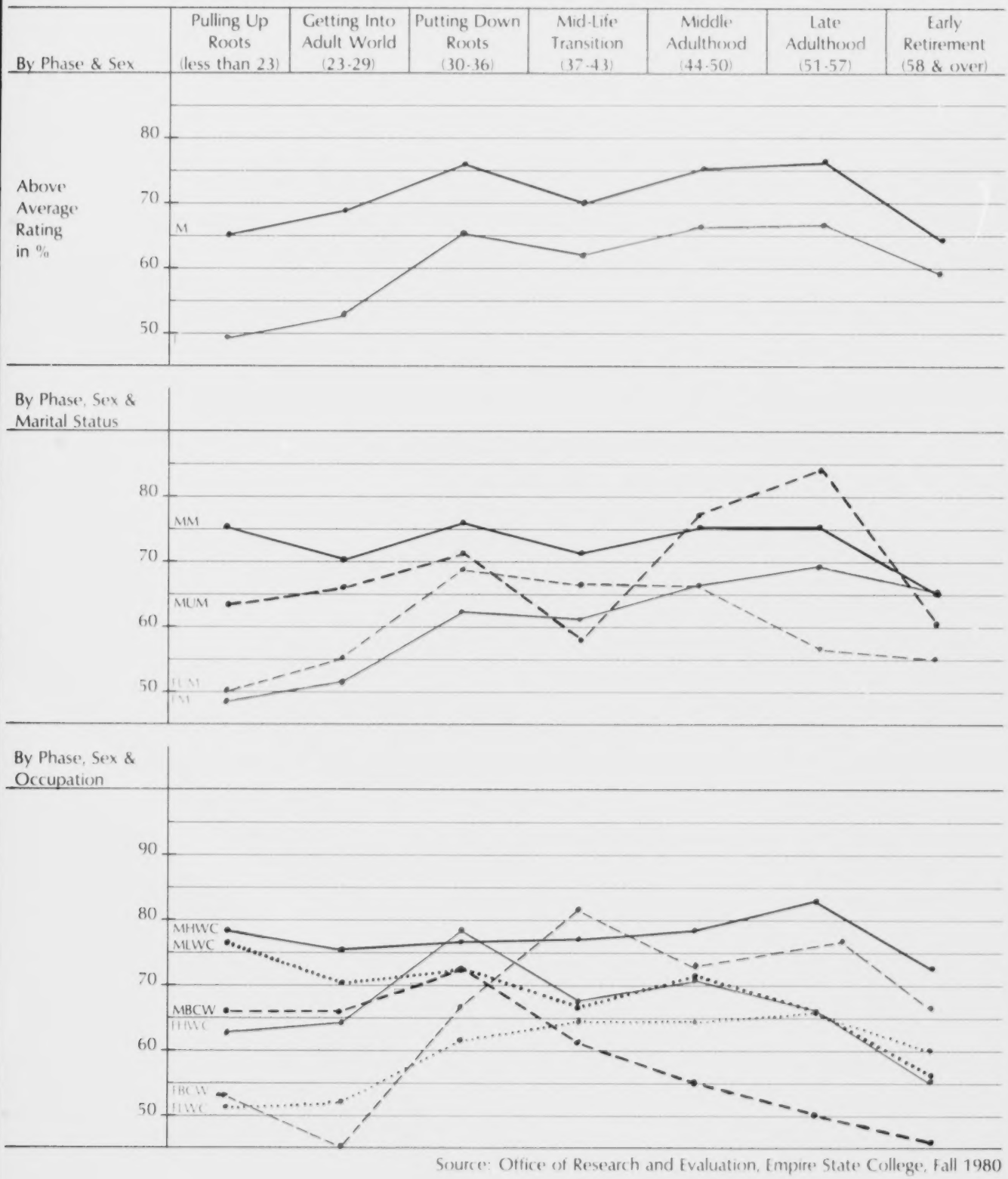
Perceptions of Success Orientation

Drive to achieve, leadership ability, ability to handle stress and independence are four traits analyzed together under the category of success orientation. These traits were selected and grouped together because they closely resemble the ideas Levinson and Gould used to describe the male path of occupational ambition and achievement over the life cycle.

Figures 2 and 3 illustrate male and female responses for two of the success orientation traits so that we can compare entering students' perceptions, thus beginning to answer the question posed above. Let us examine the male and female patterns here: For the trait, "leadership ability," the top level profile shows 65% of the males at pulling up roots phase above-average; 76% of males above-average at putting down roots phase, 70% above-average at mid-life, 75% at middle adulthood and 77% at late adulthood. In short, males reveal a pattern, for each cohort, of a steady rise across the first three phases, a decline at mid-life and an increase and stabilization for the next two phases.

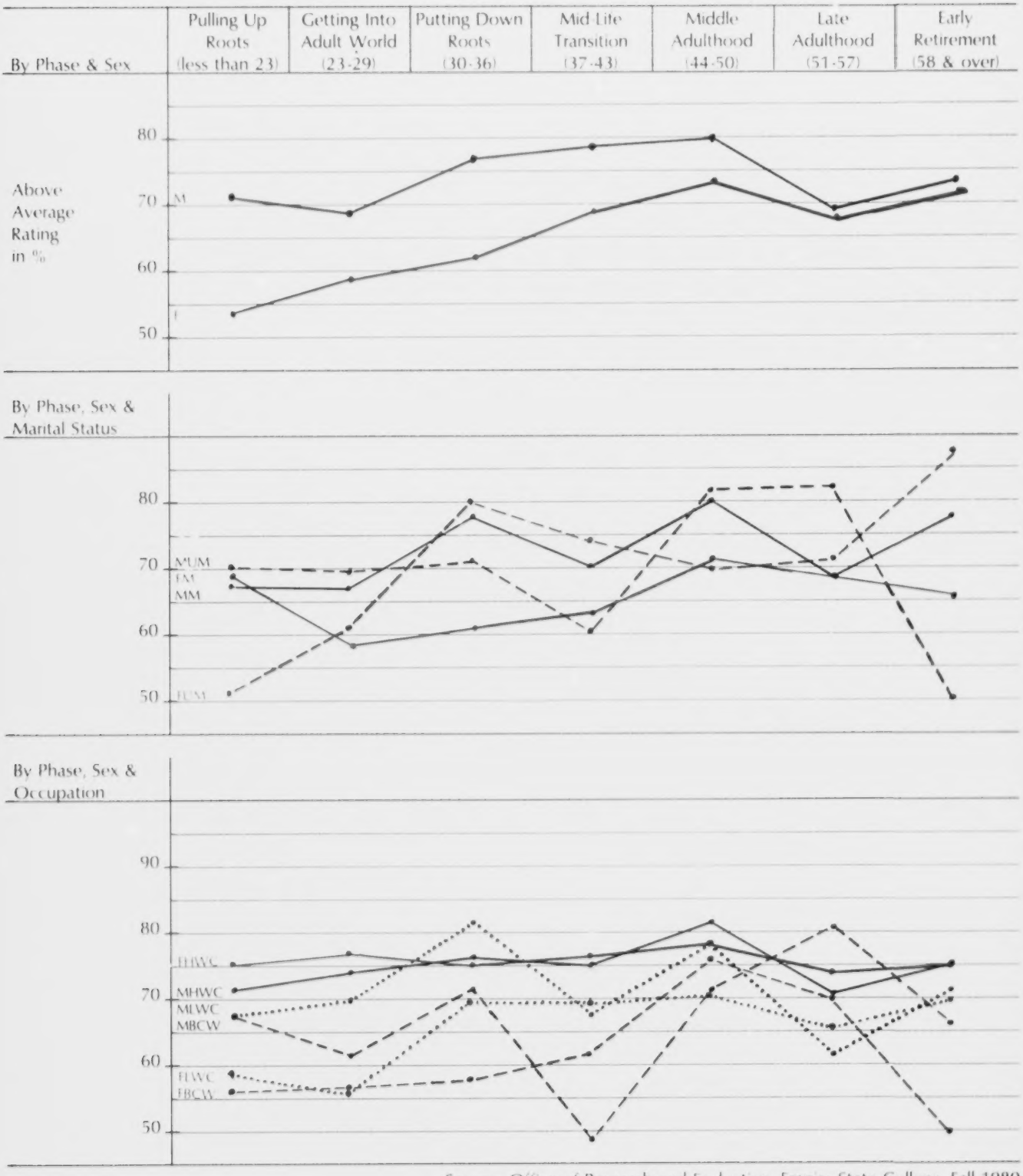
The profiles developed by linking the data responses across each phase show certain patterns but the reader must remember that each age-phase grouping represents a different cohort of respondents, not the same individuals across all phases. These data are cross-sectional, not longitudinal.

STUDENTS' PERCEPTIONS OF THEIR LEADERSHIP ABILITY



Source: Office of Research and Evaluation, Empire State College, Fall 1980

STUDENTS' PERCEPTIONS OF THEIR ABILITY TO HANDLE STRESS



Source: Office of Research and Evaluation, Empire State College, Fall 1980

M = male ————————
F = female ————————

MM = male—married ————
FM = female—married ————

MUM = male—unmarried – – – – –
FUM = female—unmarried – – – – –

MHWC = male high white collar occupation ————
FHWC = female high white collar occupation ————

MLWC = male lower white collar occupation .....
FLWC = female lower white collar occupation .....

MBCW = male blue collar worker – – – – –
FBCW = female blue collar worker – – – – –

Women show a similar profile to men with perceptual ratings some 10-15% points below men at each phase. When we introduce marital status as a control variable, the middle level profile on the page, we see married males (MM) and married females (FM) showing essentially the same patterns as shown in the first picture. However, the unmarried males (MUM) and females (FUM) reveal somewhat different patterns. Unmarried males drop sharply at mid-life (10% below unmarried females), then rise dramatically during the next two phases of middle and late adulthood. Unmarried females reach almost the same point as unmarried males by putting down roots phase and remain close to that level for the next two phases. In comparing males and females when marital status is introduced, we find that there are still important differences between the sexes, especially the leadership abilities of unmarried females across the three mid-life phases. Finally, we introduced occupation as a control variable. Each person's occupation was coded using a modified Census classification scheme into high white collar (executives, professionals, managerial/supervisory), low white collar (clerical, sales, technical, semi-professional) and blue collar (skilled, semi-skilled and un-skilled jobs). As one might expect, males in high white collar positions (MHWC) rate themselves across all phases between 75% and 85% in a rather consistent fashion. In contrast, female high white collar workers (FHWC) show, cohort by cohort, much more variation. FHWC start at 63% level, the pulling up roots phase, move to 79% at putting down roots (surpassing males at this point); dropping

down at mid-life and continuing to decline during the following three periods. Female blue collar workers (FBCW) in contrast to male blue collar workers (MBCW), pass males at mid-life 82% to 62% and show high levels of perceived leadership ability for the remaining three developmental phases. Controlling for occupation does little to reduce the differences between male and female lower white collar workers; female lower white collar workers (FLWH) are considerably below in ratings of male lower white collar workers (MLWC) for six of the seven phases.

What can we say, in sum, about male and female perceptions of leadership ability? Men and women differ across the developmental phases by statistically significant degrees. There are general patterns, cohort by cohort, across the life span, consistent dips at mid-life and some peculiar variations when marital status and occupations are introduced as control variables. Overall, men and women rate themselves quite high on leadership ability, reaching peak ratings at mid-life and middle adulthood.

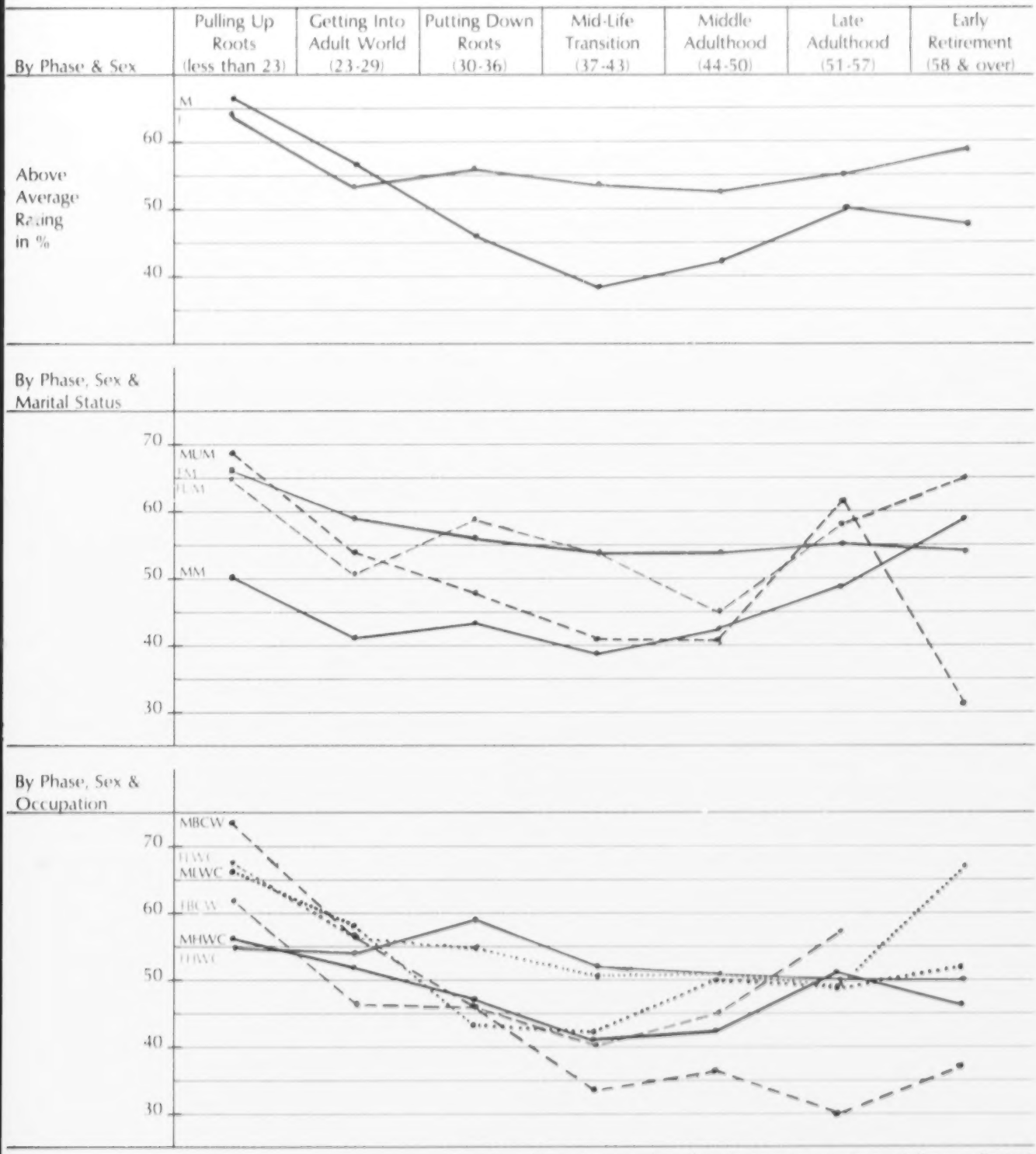
Figure 3 shows the success orientation trait of "ability to handle stress." Women are considerably below men in ability to handle stress, although their perceptions show a phase-by-phase rise from 54% at pulling up roots to 74% at middle adulthood. Introducing the control variable, marital status, reveals unmarried females surpassing all others at putting down roots phase (80% to married males 78%). Unmarried males perceive their ability to handle stress at mid-life as low (60%), some 15% points below unmarried females. When occupation is introduced, we see a closing of differences between male and female high white collar workers, suggesting that occupation accounts for a large amount of the variance here. At mid-life there is a decline in all groups, most notably among MBCW (to 48%) and MLCW. FBCW show a steady increase in their ability to handle stress up to a peak (76%) at middle adulthood.

PERCEPTIONS OF ACADEMIC COMPETENCE

Let us now turn to Figures 4 and 5 showing male and female perceptions of their academic abilities. Although I have grouped five different traits under the general designation of academic competence (academic ability, writing ability, reading ability, mathematical ability and intellectual self-confidence), it will be possible here to discuss only two traits.

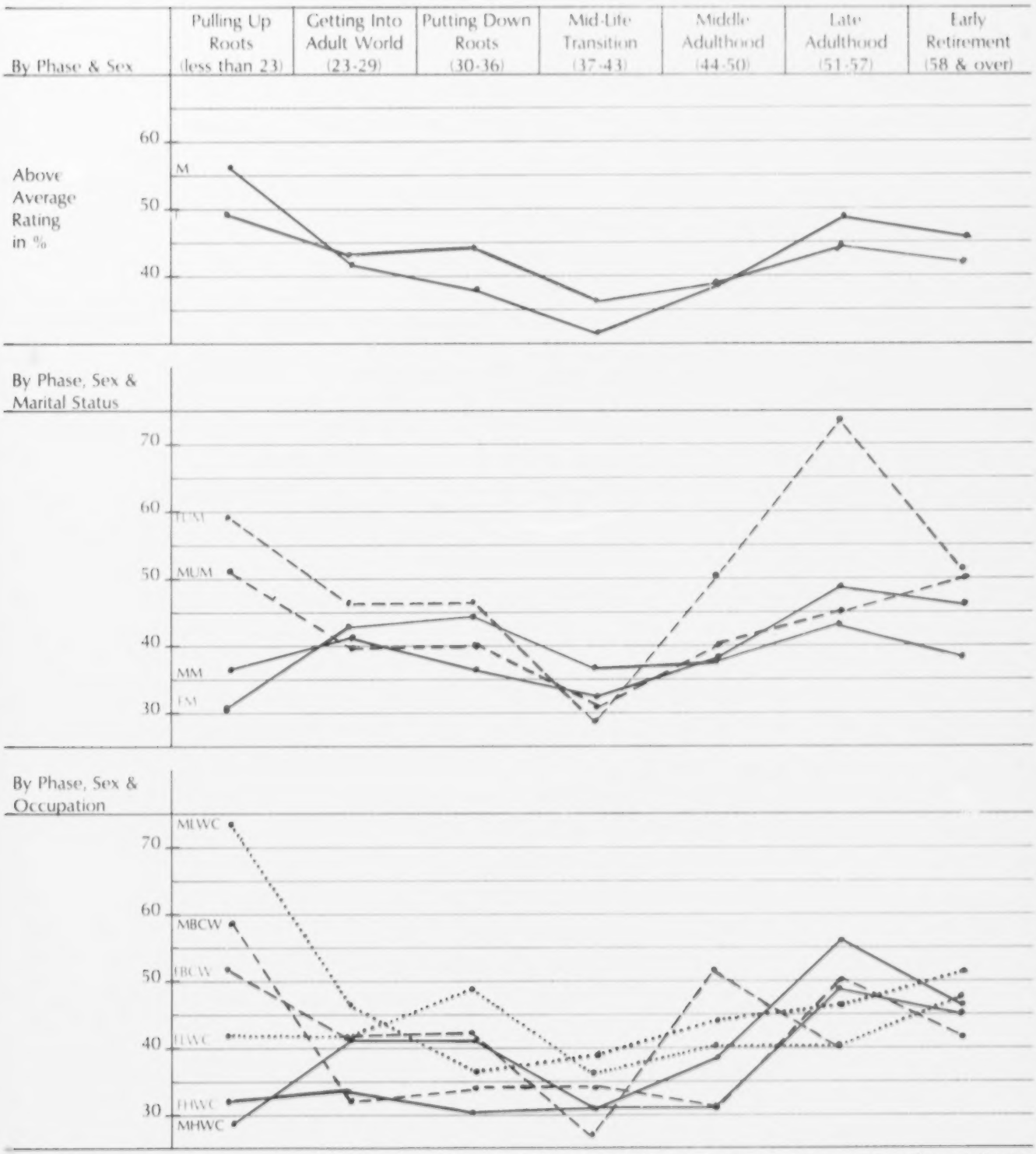
Academic Ability Both men and women at pulling up roots phase have similarly high perceptions of their academic ability (65%) but men drop, cohort by cohort, dramatically reaching a low point (38%) at mid-life, some 15% points below women at the same phase. When marital status is introduced, married females clearly show higher self-perceptions of their academic abilities than married males across all seven phases. Unmarried males follow a similar pattern to married males except for a substantial rise at late adulthood reaching a peak at 62%. Unmarried females show a rise at putting down roots phase and a sizable rise during the last two phases from a low point at middle adulthood to a high rating of 65% at early retirement. When occupation is introduced, MHWC and FHWC are similar at early and late phases, but separated during the three middle phases (30-50 year categories) with FHWC showing the highest perceived academic abilities. MBWC, in contrast, start off with the highest rating (74%) but drop to a low point of 34% at mid-life and even lower point of 30% by late adulthood. FBCW are at the same level as MBCW at the putting down roots phase (46%), but then reveal higher perceptions of academic abilities after mid-life.

STUDENTS' PERCEPTIONS OF THEIR ACADEMIC ABILITY



Source: Office of Research and Evaluation, Empire State College, Fall 1980

STUDENTS' PERCEPTIONS OF THEIR WRITING ABILITY



Source: Office of Research and Evaluation, Empire State College, Fall 1980

Writing Ability Men and women are relatively close across all seven developmental periods, again showing a basic pattern of starting off at 50-55% level, dropping to 30-35% level at mid-life and rising up by the last phase. When marital status is introduced, married males and females are close in their perceptions. Unmarried females show a higher perception than married males at early phases, a substantial drop at mid-life and a then dramatic jump at middle and late adulthood, reaching a peak of 74%. Examining phase, sex and occupation together, we see close parallels between FHWC and MHWC but fairly sizable differences between MLWC and FLWC and MBCW and FBCW across most of the seven phases.

THE DIAMOND SHAPE OF PERCEPTIONS: SUCCESS ORIENTATIONS AND ACADEMIC COMPETENCE COMPARED

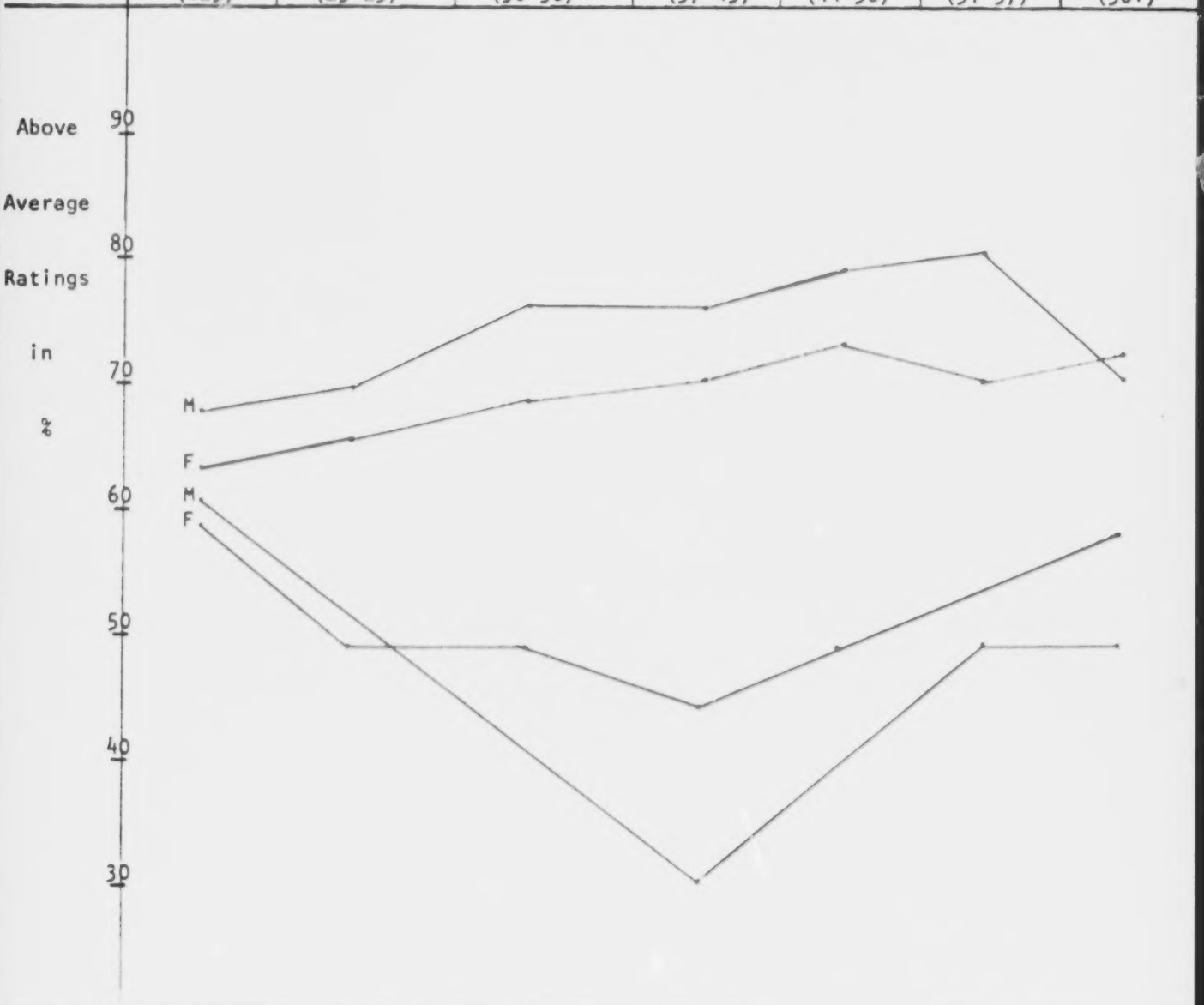
Although it is quite fascinating to continue looking at individual trait figures and to think about male-female patterns across the life cycle, we can usefully summarize what these profiles show by discussing the diamond shape of entering students' perceptions.

In general, men and women reveal similar patterns on both successs orientations traits and traits of academic competence.

The diamond shape of perceptions means this: men and women perceive themselves to be in the 60-70% level at the pulling up roots phase, increase over the next two phases, reaching 75% level by mid-life and remain at that level or slightly higher for the next two phases. These adults have lived a good part of their lives, taken on leadership and family responsibilities and view themselves as rather successful in meeting life's challenges. Perceptions of academic competence, however, fill out the bottom side of the diamond. Both men and women at the pulling up roots phase see themselves as academically

Figure 6

COMPARISON OF STUDENTS' PERCEPTIONS ON SUCCESS ORIENTATION TRAITS AND ACADEMIC ABILITIES



Source: Office of Research and Evaluation, Empire State College, Fall 1980.

able but by mid-life there is a distinct and sharp drop (from 60-65% to 30-40%) in their perceived abilities to handle academic work. We have, therefore, a diamond shape with especially substantial gaps at mid-life. Adults at mid-life see themselves as successful; that is to say, they are competent and have tested themselves out in the practical, real world of adult living but have serious doubts about entering or reentering the world of education.

As the diamond shape of perceptions reveals, women have a more compact profile and less serious gap at mid-life (a 25% difference compared to men with a 45% difference), although these differences are still quite sizable. What are some of the practical implications of the self concept data presented for faculty who engage adult learners in their mid-life quests for learning, for support staff and the kind of support services needed by mid-life learners, and for female and male adult learners themselves. Let us first look at the teaching faculty.

The Faculty as Developmental Mentors

Faculty members who teach in adult or continuing education programs or who are involved in alternative colleges like Empire State carry very different responsibilities and obligations when they work with adults. I want to draw again upon Empire State's experiences to set up the general points I will make about faculty serving as "developmental mentors." At ESC faculty are called mentors. Mentors advise and counsel students, assist students in the design of their degree programs and the preparation of their portfolios for advanced standing, help students construct meaningful learning contracts, offer appropriate instruction, assess and evaluate student work, and develop instructional resources for student use (Empire State College, 1974, 1979; Bradley 1975, pp. 7-17 and Bradley 1978). That's the official, public, job description. Students work with faculty mentors primarily in a one-to-one

learning situation. As you can see from this brief description, the mentor's role goes beyond the traditional faculty member's responsibilities.

Let us now put the student-mentor relationship in the context of adult development. Levinson argues that for people, particularly in their 20's and 30's, a mentorial relationship is crucial to their successful resolution of developmental tasks at corresponding phases and instrumental in moving to the next life cycle phase (Levinson, et. al., 1974, p. 251; 1978, pp. 97-101). Levinson posits certain conditions underlying the individual-mentor relationship. First, the mentor is usually 8-15 years older than the mentee, old enough to impart greater wisdom and authority but near enough in age and attitudes to be almost a peer or somewhat older brother or sister. Second, the mentor has already passed through the immediate phase facing the mentee and has the necessary life experience and developmental understanding to guide a mentee through phases and transitions successfully. Third, mentor-mentee relationships of the same sex enhances the relationship as far as we know whereas opposite sex relationships may or may not. Present research has been limited to mentor-mentee relationships of the same sex. Levinson's studies show male mentors providing sponsorship and guidance to male mentees with the primary focus on the male's career development. Further research is needed to determine whether and how male and female students can profit from female and male mentors--a task we are working on at Empire State.

The implications of Levinson's developmental mentors for faculty in higher education programs are important in several ways. For a faculty member to become a developmental mentor, he/she must expand the faculty role, skills and competencies to encompass the developmental tasks that face a student in a given phase. For example, the initial assignment of a mentor to a

student in developmental terms should consider the age difference, possibly the sex difference, and certainly the age-phase experiences of the mentor in regard to the mentee. Although we know relatively little in terms of of formal research knowledge about the ways in which the mentor-student relationship works developmentally, alternative educational programs do have a fund of experience from which to extract preliminary developmental consequences.

The counseling aspects of a mentor's role take on new dimensions if the mentor addresses the developmental tasks facing students. For example, mid-life males and females may have very different kinds of counseling and advising needs (academic, vocational, developmental), during the transition to a new life structure. Females at mid-life perceive themselves at a new juncture and have improved their academic interests and life expectations from preceding lower levels. A developmentally conscious mentor should take into account the age, sex, and phase of the student, including the developmental tasks to be confronted, and provide the kind of advising needed to sustain the student at a particular phase.

An important caveat must be made at this point. I am not arguing that faculty should work with students in a therapeutic relationship. Mentors are not trained to be therapists nor are many mentors interested in or capable of counseling, advising and working with students in that kind of one-to-one relationship. A developmentally conscious mentor, however, is sensitive to the needs of adult students, can recognize the developmental tasks ahead and use the educational process as a setting in which adult learning can be enhanced.

Conceptualizing the role of faculty in an adult development context has another set of implications for the personal and professional activities of

faculty themselves. Faculty (as well as program administrators) encounter developmental phases of the life cycle much as do adult learners. The life cycle phases and transitions have a direct bearing upon the quality of the faculty's work, their own professional growth and satisfaction, and the contributions faculty can make to a more effective education of their students (Hodgkinson, 1974).

In sum, conceiving of the faculty role as a developmental mentor for adult learners means that faculty must face much more directly than ever before their own developmental growth, their own professional and educational commitments, the limits of their own teaching styles and kinds of knowledge they impart, and the educational significance of working with adults who want more out of an educational experience than carefully packaged knowledge, cognitive skills and certification. Such a faculty role opens up the traditional view of faculty as expert authority in a given discipline and requires a developmental mentor to juggle often conflicting expectations and awesome tasks to meet the educational needs of adult learners.

Adult Support Services and Support Staff

Since the mid-1970's, higher education has begun to take serious interest in the adult student and the particular developmental needs such students have. We have seen the rise of adult life resource centers, like the one at the University of Kansas, (McCoy, 1979, pp. 45-53); women's resources centers (Ironside and Buckland 1979), mid-career planning workshops (Entine 1979); mid-life assessment activities such as that sponsored by CAEL; and self-assessment efforts for personal development, sponsored by Future Directions for a Learning Society (Arbeiter et. al. 1978; Aslanian and Brickell 1980) to mention but a few among the hundreds of efforts now going on nationally.

Knowledge of developmental tasks and life cycle phases has direct application to student support services and for those professionals who work with adults in counseling, career planning and placement, and in adult development (Knefelkamp, 1978; Knox, 1979). Moving away from old labels of "student services" to a focus on adults requires more conscious application of adult development research on such topics as career development, dual-career families, mid-life stress, family disintegration and reconstruction and life-cycle change. Moving away from a traditional model in which staff and faculty have ultimate authority over the student to an adult development model that incorporates and sustains the adult as active decision-maker in his/her struggle to restructure the meaning of life events and developmental tasks is a very important change. Programs are now being developed around life cycle phases that hold promise in bringing the resources of universities and colleges into a new focus around the special needs of adult learning (Weathersby and Tarule, 1980; Weathersby 1980). Knowledge of adult development theory and the conditions of adult learning places adult support services in a new situation. Support service staff must rethink the old situation of service delivery and seek a new balance in their professional commitments to serve adult learners.

Male and Female Learners at Mid-Life: A Promise of Self-Actualization?

Earlier we said that the mid-life transition period is one where stress is very high and the likelihood of personal crisis in confronting and resolving developmental tasks is also high. In Levinson's 40 cases, 80% of the men experienced the mid-life transition phase as a severe crisis (1978, p. 199). It is not surprising, then, in examining data from entering students that a perceptual gap of sizable magnitude (35-45%) should appear. In fact, there are some obvious implications from both the Levinson/Gould theory and the

empirical data just covered to support the argument as to why we should find, for example, higher-than-usual attrition rates at mid-life and higher-than-average graduation rates in the phases on either side of the mid-life transition period.

A Closing Snapshot of Data: Graduation/Attrition Rates

In order to test our hypotheses about the mid-life transition period and to assess the basic implication of our perceptual data, we followed the entering students' progress in the College noting their graduation/attrition rates. Figure 7 shows the graduation rates for males and females at three developmental phases.* To my surprise, I encountered a much-unexpected finding: Both men and women (58%) have significantly higher graduation rates at mid-life than at either adjacent phase. Sixty-four percent of women graduate at mid-life. In the putting down roots phase, 58% of women but only 26% of the men graduated while 44% of both men and women graduated at middle adulthood. The basic graduation rate was 48%.

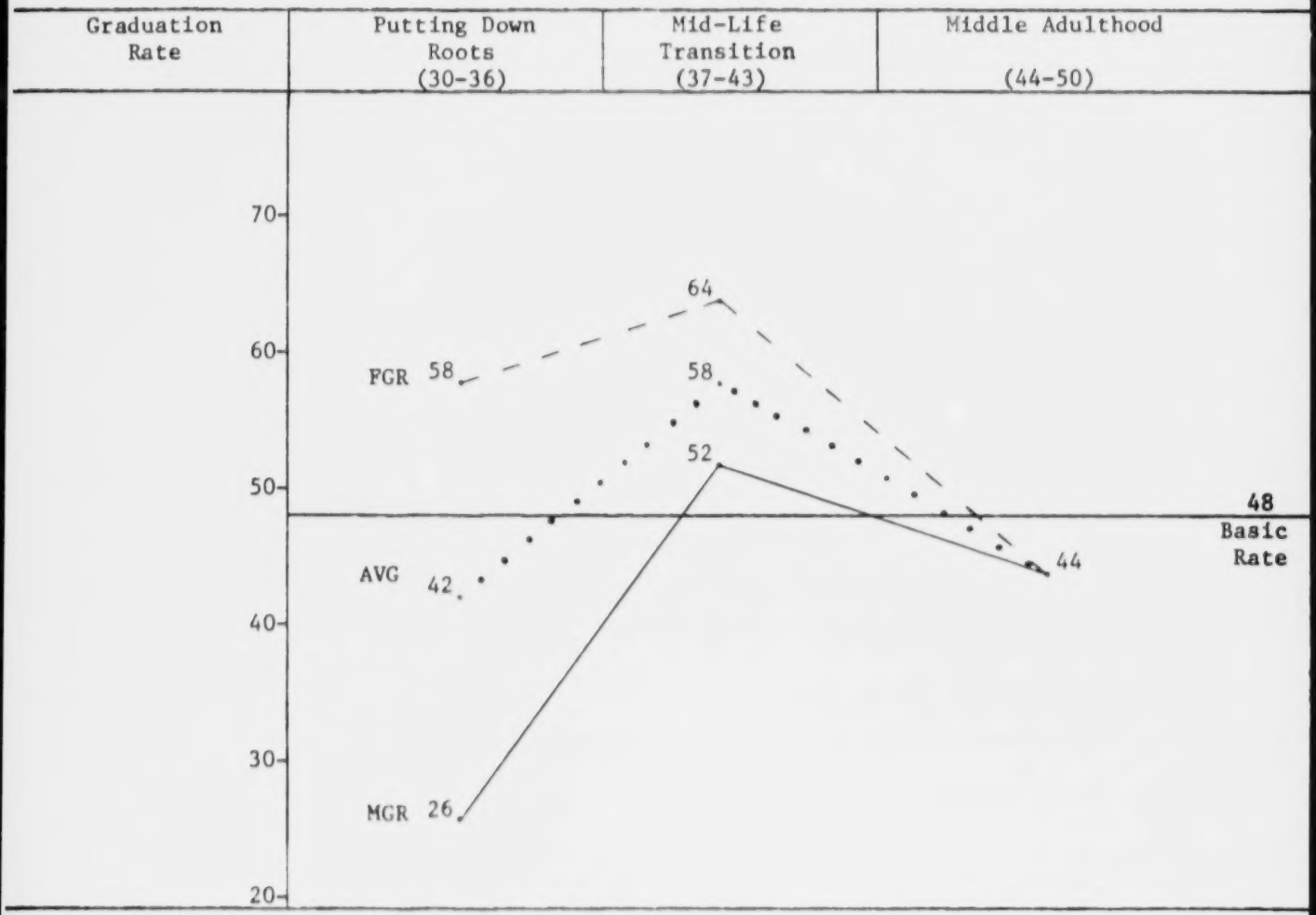
What does the high graduation rate at mid-life do to my argument? There is a strange and paradoxical twist that mid-life adults, facing stress and developmental pressures most likely to lead to attrition, graduate in higher proportions than adult learners at any other phase. How can this be? What is going on during the mid-life transition period?

The mid-life transition period represents fundamentally a second chance or last chance opportunity for many adults who make up their minds that, no matter what, they intend to complete a degree. In the interviews and detailed

* A random sample of 300 individuals (50 men and 50 women for each of three different phases) was drawn from the Student Biographical Inventory respondents in those phases and a records check made to determine their graduation or attrition status after four and one-half years of elapsed time.

Figure 7

Graduation/Attrition Rates on Entering Students for Selected Phases (N=300)



Source: Office of Research & Evaluation, Empire State College, Fall, 1980.

FGR=Female graduation rate
MGR=Male graduation rate
AVG=Average graduation rate

case studies the research office has conducted over the years, we have found a remarkable persistence by men and particularly by women at mid-life to earn their degrees (Lehmann and Lester, 1978). For this particular group, entering college, again or for the first time, becomes itself a marker event. These adults clearly recognize they are at the mid-life transition point - the future must be shaped differently and education is one path to reconstructing their lives.

The earning of a college degree by mid-life takes on an enormous personal, practical and symbolic significance. In an era where higher education awards almost one million degrees annually, adults working very hard under the pressures of the mid-life transition period, all too often fade into the morass of higher education statistics (Brodzinski 1980). But for many such adults at Empire State, the earning of a degree comes close to what Maslow called a "peak experience" or what Levinson calls a "culminating event"--a certain moment in the life of an adult where the person is especially enriched, is more sensitively aware and has restructured his or her life in a fundamental fashion.

Is there (or should there be) a connection between education and peak experience? How often do we raise this question in our classrooms or on our campuses? What does it mean in developmental terms to conceptualize the educational process in terms of culminating events? How would we design programs differently for adult learners if we take into account developmental tasks at various phases of life? (Greenberg 1980)

Permit me to return once again to the setting I know best. At Empire State we have begun to think much more systematically about the educational experience and the impact of that experience on the lives of adult learners.

ESC's program continually raises the question of purpose. What does a student want to study and why? How do past life learnings relate to a degree program? What is the purpose and direction of a student's degree program plan? What are the goals of each learning contract and how do they contribute to the student's overall objectives? What does the individual want to do with his/her life?

The question of goals infuses almost every educational activity a student undertakes at ESC. These goal questions are basically cognitive in nature although they contain the seeds of serious psychological insight and self-assessment. Thus, the completion of a student's portfolio under certain conditions contains the basic elements of a potential peak experience--a realization of one's life in both an objective, cognitive way and a new psychological self-awareness of what the student's life adds up to at a given phase of development. The crystallization of an individual's life, as reflected in a portfolio and degree program plan, seems to bring together life cycle events, life learnings and an educational program into a unified whole that can have and, frequently does have, a staggering impact on the adult involved. Graduation at mid-life is truly a culminating event--a life transition well worth celebrating at this Conference. If Empire State men and particularly women students at mid-life are somewhat typical of returning adults, then alternative educational programs can make a very important contribution to reconstructing life structures for the second half of life.

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